BYZANTINE PAINTING

AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WEST BEFORE A.D. 1200

DAVID TALBOT RICE

With 37 Illustrations

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Frontispiece *Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow*

OUR LADY OF VLADIMIR *Twelfth century*

Panel Constantinople style

BYZANTINE PAINTING

AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WEST BEFORE A.D. 1200

DAVID TALBOT RICE

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WITH 37 PLATES IN COLOUR AND MONOCHROME

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BYZANTINE PAINTING

I. THE BEGINNINGS

THE history of Byzantine painting covers a longer period than that of any other European School, for it began even before the adoption by Constantine the Great in the year 300 of Christianity as the State religion of the Empire that had formerly been centred on Rome; and it continued almost to the present day. True, Byzantine painting after about 1500 is seldom of serious artistic importance, and therefore does not require consideration in any general survey, while examples before about 500 are few and far between, and therefore need not detain us for long: but even so, the age from the sixth century until the sixteenth is a very considerable one. Again, the style, even at the height of its development, was extremely conservative, and there was often less change in a century or more than the art of Italy or the Netherlands saw in a single generation. Yet even so, the developments that did occur, though they were not rapid, were nevertheless extensive, and the more one gets to know the art, the clearer does this point become. The style was not nearly so set and rigid as the critics of the last century, following the lead of the historians, notably Gibbon, and, after him, Lecky, were apt to suppose.

In addition to the great extent of the Byzantine School in time, there is a similar vast extent as regards space. Though in the most exact and narrow sense of the word the Byzantine style was essentially that of the capital, Constantinople, and of the area directly dependent upon it, work which is to-day usually termed Byzantine was produced over a much wider area, extending all over the East Christian world, from Egypt to Rumania in the one direction and from Mesopotamia to Sicily in the other. The work of the outlying areas can best be grouped into a number of local Schools, all of which are distinguished by quite clearly marked individual features. But the general character of the art of all of them is akin, and the term Byzantine when loosely used serves as a convenient designation. It is an art of rather abstract character; it served the Church as a devoted servant and was concerned mainly with the depiction of the principal figures and scenes of the Bible story; and in representing these it followed set, regular rules, laid down by councils of the Church, and sanctified by long tradition. "The composition of religious imagery," it was decided at the Second Council of Nicæa in 787, "should not be left to the initiative of the artists, but formed on principles laid down by the Church and by religious traditions." These principles were at an early date formulated by the artists into a rigid iconographical system, which was handed down by master to pupil throughout numberless generations.

Such definitions at first sight conjure up visions of monotony, and suggest that the art is likely to be of interest only to students of early Christian iconography. This, however, is not the case, and apart from its importance as an essential part of Christian culture, Byzantine art is important on account of its sheer æsthetic merit. Indeed, it is in many

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respects this aspect that has been most generally neglected by historians and students of art. The aspersions cast on the Byzantine style of painting, originally by Vasari, and subsequently by numerous writers of lesser renown, have sunk deep into our minds and are not easily to be expelled. Yet Vasari wrote with a knowledge of Byzantine art that was dependent only on familiarity with a few provincial works in Italy, while more recent writers who have vilified the style have usually failed to take the trouble to become acquainted with any of its major monuments at first hand. And whereas Western painting is familiar through numerous superb examples in our galleries, Byzantine painting is not only almost unrepresented in our museums, but, further, there are extremely few coloured reproductions to take the place of originals; the few coloured plates that have been made have been published in books which are not readily available to any but a few specialists who know where to find them; of many of them there is perhaps not more than one copy in Great Britain. Thus in order to get a true idea of the works themselves it is necessary to journey to far-off regions, often difficult of access. The nearest places where panel-paintings of quality are to be seen are Athens and Moscow, and most of the best wall-paintings are preserved in inaccessible monasteries in Greece, the Balkans, Turkey and Russia.

But those who have been fortunate enough to make the journeys and to see some of the originals have at once realised the outstanding quality of much of the work. When once seen, these paintings stand out with remarkable clarity in the memory; and the writer at least has the most vivid pictures in his mind of numerous wall-paintings and panels that he has been lucky enough to study; some of them, alas! will, thanks to the destructions of the war, never be seen again. No parts of the world have suffered so severely from wars and tumults as have Russia, Greece, Turkey and the Balkans, where all of the best Byzantine work was produced, and it seems tragic that the inevitable destructions of past ages should have been added to so conspicuously in the twentieth century.

The actual story of Byzantine wall-painting begins in the catacombs of Rome on the one hand and in some minute shrines that have recently been unearthed in Syria on the other. That of Byzantine icons, and with it, of the whole of European panel painting, starts with the Hellenistic mummy portraits † of Egypt. Yet neither are the catacomb paintings always purely Roman nor the mummy portraits purely Hellenistic. In both there is as often as not a distinct abstract element, which is to be seen in a lack of interest in naturalism and in a curiously violent treatment; attention is given to significance and inner meaning rather than to elegance and surface beauty; colours are strong and forceful rather than delicate. The style may indeed perhaps best be designated by borrowing a term which has recently become very popular in critical writings on modern art, namely "expressionism."

This "expressionist" style was conceived in Syria–Palestine in pre-Christian times, and began to spread westwards at the very date that the new faith of Christianity was beginning to meet with its first acclamation in the old classical world. Its influence began

† Plate 5

to be felt in Egypt as early as the second century of the Christian era and had become preponderant there by the fourth century, except for Alexandria, where a love of Hellenic elegance and idealism survived till about the year 600. In Rome the "expressionist" influence was felt about the same time, and though the Eastern style never became so firmly established there as in Egypt, its effect was marked in primitive Christian and late classical art alike. It is often, though not always, to the fore in the catacomb paintings of Rome.

These need not detain us for very long. They are usually of interest and often of quality, but they do not show any of the stylistic features which later distinguish Byzantine art. In appearance they are classical rather than Christian; in subject they generally depict single figures, such as the Virgin or a Saint in the Orans position, that is to say, with arms raised in the attitude of oblation. Developed Byzantine art is, on the other hand, more complex, and is more concerned with scenes and groups than with single figures. The panels of Egypt, however, call for closer attention, if only on technical grounds. The system of laying consecutive layers of gesso, canvas and gesso upon the wood in preparation for the paint, that was evolved in making them continued in use until the days of the Italian primitives, and the whole of Christian panel painting may be said to derive directly from the mummy portraits of the second century in this respect. Even as regards style their influence was considerable, and numerous early Christian panels, as well as certain wall-paintings, show their influence; a panel from Egypt and some medallions † of the ninth century at Qaranleq Kilisse in Cappadocia may be compared.

In the days of pagan rule extensive church decoration had been precluded, on the one hand by pagan oppression and on the other by the restricted spaces available in such places as the Christians used for their secret meetings. But with the adoption of Christianity as the State religion and the transfer by Constantine of the capital of the Empire to Constantinople, the old Byzantium, in 330, the whole situation was changed. From soon after this date whole churches were decorated with elaborate compositions. A few fragments of the earliest decorations remain, for instance, in Sta. Maria Antiqua at Rome, but no complete scheme in paint has survived. We must turn instead to the more sumptuous and more durable material of mosaic to gather an idea of what these decorations were like. The elaborate series of scenes from the New Testament on the triumphal arch of Sta. Maggiore at Rome (dating from between 432 and 440), or the long façade of scenes on the side-walls of the basilica of St. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna, dating from between 520 and 526, are typical. They show that a developed repertory of Christian illustration and a defined iconographical system had already been arrived at by the fifth century, and even if many of the characteristics of antique pagan art survive, the ideas of Christian church decoration are already there in embryo. Of the antique elements the most important is the conception of Christ as a youthful, beardless figure, akin to a pagan Apollo in appearance. This is especially obvious in a mosaic of *Christ as the Good Shepherd* ‡ in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna. (On the death of Galla Placidia's father, the Emperor Theodosius the Great, in 393, the Empire became for a time divided, one

† Plate 6 ‡ Plate 7

Emperor ruling the East Christian world from Constantinople and his co-ruler controlling the West from Ravenna ; Galla Placidia resided at Ravenna.)

By the seventh century this conception of Christ as a youth had given place to that of the heavily bearded, rather emaciated figure which is so familiar to-day. The new manner penetrated to Italy and the Byzantine sphere from Syria, and derived from the bearded divinity of old Semitic art. It constitutes in fact one of the most obvious elements of the "expressionist" style to which we have referred above, and the importance of this trend can be estimated by the fact that the Christ is shown in this way over the whole Byzantine area from the seventh century onwards. It thus not only becomes universal in the East, as attested by more than one important series of paintings in Asia Minor, but is also of importance in the heart of the empire itself, at Constantinople and Salonica, and in the more westerly dependants, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania. Even in Russia the same element is to be distinguished. But in all these regions a preliminary fusion of Eastern and Western, of Semitic and Classical, elements had taken place, a fusion which is the fundamental basis of the Byzantine style. This fusion seems first to have been manifested in architecture; in any case Justinian's buildings, more especially his great cathedral of St. Sophia at Constantinople (532–537) are in a completely new architectural style, where Eastern elements go hand in hand with Classical. The sculpture that decorates them is again conceived with completely new æsthetic criteria in view, for ornament which depends on the contrast of dark and light tones, like a silhouette, replaces that of the classical world, where naturalistic modelling was the object. We see the change also in mosaic, for example in the panels on the north and south walls of the presbytery of St. Vitale, showing Justinian and his Court opposite Theodora his Empress.† The style is to a great extent Eastern, and the love of brilliant colour betokens this, as well as the severely frontal poses of the figures.

Of painting in the East at this time even less remains than in Italy. All the very important mosaics that once adorned the great basilicas of Syria–Palestine, at Jerusalem, Bethlehem or Jerash, though they must have been quite as fine as those of Italy, have disappeared, and the only paintings we know are those from a small Christian church and a synagogue at Dura, which date from about 232 and 245 respectively. Both comprise Bible scenes, those of the latter from the Old Testament. In both the style is "expressionist," the artist being concerned with conveying an idea rather than with representing natural forms.

The lack of material on a large scale is, however, to some extent made up for by paintings of small size, for one or two fine books of fifth or sixth century date survive, which show the Syrian style quite clearly in their illustrations. One in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, known as the Sinope fragment, shows the dumpy figures, the exaggerated proportions, and the stress on realism rather than idealism that are typical of the "expressionist" manner, and the same is true of the larger and more complete *Vienna Genesis*, which has been variously assigned to the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries by different authorities; the fifth is the most likely. A delightful picture of the *Meeting of Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well* ‡ gives a good idea of the vivid quality of the best work of

† Plate 8 ‡ Plate 10

the School. The famous codex at Rossano in South Italy, of the fifth or sixth century, is again akin, though here the fusion between the " expressionist " comprehension of the East and the idealistic outlook of the classical world is more complete. It has, indeed, gone so far that the work is almost to be termed Byzantine in the narrower sense of the word, where the elegant, balanced art that was to become characteristic of Constantinople is meant, rather than in the wider sense, where the word is used to describe all the early Christian products of the Near East.

Before leaving Syria, one other monument must be mentioned, though it is actually not Christian in subject; it is the painting found in the temple of the Palmyrene gods † at Dura in 1919, which was described by its discoverer, Breasted, as an " Oriental forerunner of Byzantine painting." It dates from A.D. 85. Certain of the features that we see at Dura, most notably the frontal pose of the figures, the love of jewellery, and the curious detachment of the figures from the ground on which they stand, passed to Christian art from there, and even aureoles behind the heads are of similar origin; we see them in another series of paintings at Dura. The understanding here is not completely that of the " expressionist " style, for there is a greater delicacy and idealism, the figures are tall, thin and elongated rather than dumpy, they are more unworldly than expressive, and the artist seems to have been primarily concerned with rendering religious abstraction rather than with expressing anything else. This preoccupation is completely Eastern, and we are in the presence of an art which not only dominated in Asia, but also had a very deep influence on the formation of Christian art in Eastern and Western Europe alike. The dignity and balance of the classical stream, the vivid " expressionism " of Syria–Palestine, and the non-worldly etherealism of this Eastern style—all these blended to form the new art which it is our purpose to examine in the following pages. Without the play of this Eastern element Byzantine art would never have developed in the way it did: it would never have reached the ecstasy of, say, the mosaics in the dome of St. Sophia at Salonica, nor would El Greco, the last of the Greeks (though he was also the first of the Spaniards), ever have painted those pictures which critics of the last century termed " his horrors in the Escorial."

II. PAINTING FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE NINTH CENTURIES IN EAST AND WEST CHRISTENDOM

WHAT is usually called the First Golden Age of Byzantine art coincided in the main with the reign of Justinian (527–565). This was not only an age of wide temporal expansion and cultural development, but also one that in the field of art was blessed by an extremely enlightened patronage, for Justinian was not only one of the greatest builders of all time, but he also took care that the buildings he founded, and others too, were fully and sumptuously decorated. So lavish was his expenditure, however, that most of his

† Plate 9

foundations—St. Sophia, St. Irene and the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople, St. Vitale at Ravenna, and a rebuilding of the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, to mention but a few—were adorned with mosaics rather than wall-paintings.

The mosaics of this age at Ravenna, which include those in the apse of St. Apollinare in Classe as well as those of St. Vitale, have been preserved to attest the superb quality of Justinian's work. But at Bethlehem and in other buildings of the East little survives, and at important centres like Constantinople and Salonica only a few pieces of purely decorative work remain, which serve to show the lovely quality of the colours as well as the technical excellence of the work. The standard seems, if we may judge from these fragments, to have been even higher than at Ravenna, which was, after all, no more than a provincial centre, albeit an important one. It is thus a great tragedy that in the most vital centres the figural work of early times was destroyed by the Iconoclast Emperors (726–843). During this phase, when an Eastern dynasty ruled at Constantinople, no figural religious art was permitted, and all earlier monuments that depicted the saintly or Divine form were obliterated, in accordance with an old Eastern belief, which manifested itself with even greater force at much the same time in the art of the new religion of Islam.

Of actual painting, as opposed to mosaic, in Justinian's age we know very little. Such panels as survive have already been alluded to; there is little to distinguish them from works of the fifth century. Practically no wall-paintings have been preserved; in the central area, indeed, there is nothing, and all that we can do is to call attention once more to Sta. Maria Antiqua at Rome, where portions of the work are perhaps to be attributed to an artist who had learnt in Constantinople. Paintings of this period in a number of churches in Egypt are essentially provincial in character; they are in the distinct style known as Coptic, which was developed by the Christians of Egypt, and which, though vigorous, has nothing of the elegance and balance of true Byzantine work.

Work of the eighth and ninth centuries is equally scarce, for at that time little in the way of religious painting was done in the more central portions of the Byzantine world, as a result of the Iconoclast ban referred to above. But it is probable that a good deal of secular work was executed so that a tradition in draughtsmanship was maintained; and in the more out-of-the-way regions where the central control was not firmly enforced, quite a number of religious paintings were executed; those in some cave chapels at Latmos, near Miletus on the west coast of Asia Minor, may be noted. The caves are of irregular shape, and the paintings cover roof and wall in a somewhat haphazard manner. The colours are vivid and the work quite effective, though it is of a primitive rather than a polished character, having been executed by the hand of the monks of the locality, who were hardly to be compared, as artists, with those of the capital.

Also in the main of monastic character are the better-known paintings of Cappadocia. Here, though many of the churches are cut in the rock, they nevertheless follow the forms of built edifices, being often complete with domes and columns, so that the arrangement of the subjects is more precise and elaborate. The standard of work is very much higher than at Latmos, and some of the paintings are really distinguished. They are mostly extremely hard to date, for even the best of the work was of a very conservative character,

and there is little to distinguish that which was done during the tenth and eleventh centuries from that done during the Iconoclast age, except that none of it is in the accomplished highly polished style which characterises the central Byzantine area from the tenth century onwards.

Of the many churches of Cappadocia, that at Qaranleq contains some of the best-known paintings in the region. They are to be dated to the ninth century, and are in the crude yet vigorous style which we alluded to in the first chapter as emanating from Syria. The expression and vigour of the paintings compensates to some extent for the lack of elegance and polish, and they are by no means negligible from the purely artistic point of view, even if at first sight they are not particularly sympathetic to Western eyes. Three medallions, showing the Archangels Michael and Gabriel on either side of Christ Emmanuel,† may be cited as examples. Similar but finer work, where great attention seems to have been paid to composition, is preserved in the church at Qeledjlar. A scene from the Apocryphal New Testament where our Lady's virginity is tested by drinking " the Water of Conviction " is illustrated; ‡ the painting is probably to be dated to the ninth century.

The paintings of the old church at Toqale, which can be dated to the tenth century, constitute the next important monument in chronological order. They are essentially doctrinal in character, a very large number of scenes from the New Testament being included on the walls and roof of the church in a series of bands without vertical borders. The work is rather crude, and there is no hint of the elegance of the true Byzantine style. Though the figures are more numerous, the work is less accomplished than that at Qeledjlar. The adjoining New Church of Toqale contains work of greater merit, wherein a hint of the polished style of Constantinople can be distinguished. A detail of the scene of *Jesus in the Temple* § is illustrated. It is probably to be dated towards the end of the tenth century.

The influence exercised by these paintings of Asia Minor on the subsequent development of Christian art was very extensive, and we will have cause to refer to them more than once as we proceed. It was, curiously enough, almost as great as that of the School of Constantinople itself. But whereas Constantinopolitan influence is usually to be found in the more civilised cities, that of Cappadocia was exercised on more isolated regions, and especially in monastic, rather than secular, centres. Thus a group of small, rather primitive churches in the south of Italy show in their decorations close affinities with Asia Minor, and even in France the influence of this same style was exercised, though there it was manifested at a rather later date.

In Rome, work of the ninth and tenth centuries is of a rather different character, for, on the one hand, we see the influence of the more elegant style of Constantinople, introduced no doubt by actual artists who sought refuge there during the first days of Iconoclasm, so that they could practise their art unfettered by puritanical controls, while, on the other, we see the presence of an indigenous style derived directly from the early Christian art of Rome and ultimately from pagan classical art, touched hardly at all by Eastern influence. Decorations of both types are to be found side by side in some

† Plate 6 ‡ Plate 11 § Plate 12

of the churches of Rome, such as Sta. Maria Antiqua and St. Saba. Both churches have been frequently repainted, the lower layers usually having been plastered over to provide a surface for the later work. The Roman style properly speaking, as exemplified in Sta. Maria Antiqua, is rather wooden; it seems to lack both the elegance of the Byzantine and the vigour of the Cappadocian work.

It is only natural that as we proceed westwards the influence of this Roman style becomes more and more important, and it is this element above anything else that is at the basis of Carolingian painting. It was not only in the interests of a purely temporal policy that Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the West at Rome in the year 800. The founder of an Empire in a hitherto almost cultureless area, he sought craftsmen and inspiration elsewhere, but as unifier of the West he was anxious to develop a culture, and with it an art, which was something more than a mere copy of what existed in the East Christian state with its capital at Constantinople. That Byzantine influence penetrated the Carolingian areas was inevitable, for Byzantium was at this time the one really flourishing centre of Christian culture. But it was the art of Italy, more especially that of Rome, that no doubt appealed most to Charlemagne and his Court.

The considerable influence exercised by this trend is clearly to be seen when we look at such a miniature as that showing St. Matthew from the Gospels of Charlemagne, now at Vienna. The rendering is essentially "classical," and there is no hint of that abstraction which was soon to become so vital a characteristic of Byzantine art. Nor is there any sign of the vivid "expressionism" of Syria and Asia Minor. Carolingian art is, rather, strong, firm and prosaic, and exhibits just those features which at an earlier date serve to distinguish Roman art from Greek.

Unfortunately we know practically nothing of its major monuments in paint, for all that have been preserved are some scenes from the life of St. Stephen painted on the walls of the church of St. Germain at Auxerre, dating from about 855. Some mosaics in the church of St. Germigny-les-Prés (Loiret), which showed the angels at the Tomb, were unfortunately practically entirely destroyed in the last century. They were of the same date as the church, namely, between 799 and 818. The Auxerre paintings are in a distinctly classical style, showing that picturesque approach found in late pagan art, such as decorated the villas of Pompeii; the mosaics followed a Byzantine model closely.

On a smaller scale, however, there is a considerable wealth of material, and miniature paintings of the Carolingian age are comparatively numerous. A number of different Schools, working at the capital, Aachen, and other cities such as Hildesheim or in monasteries such as St. Gall, are to be distinguished. In some of the manuscripts Byzantine influence is to be seen, and others are in the Celtic style which was introduced from Ireland; but most of them are in the more classical vein which we must regard as the hallmark of Carolingian art.

III. BYZANTINE PAINTING FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

THE story of Byzantine painting in the first ten centuries of the Christian era is very incomplete, owing to the small number of monuments that have been preserved; and in the absence of paintings on wall or panel it has often proved necessary to complete the survey by reference to miniatures in manuscripts. For the arts of this early age this is far less misleading than it would be to-day. In the first place, the manuscripts were usually of great importance in themselves and had a monumental character unknown in book illustrations in the Western world; and, in the second place, the books actually served as models for paintings on a larger scale, which followed them figure for figure and line for line, so that the wall-paintings were often little more than enlarged miniatures.

But with the eleventh century monuments on a larger scale become rather more numerous, and we can continue the story, only referring occasionally to books: when we do so it will be because of the outstanding quality of their illustrations. Nor will it be necessary to say much of the mosaics, though it must be remembered that the wealth of the Eastern court was still considerable, and that the more sumptuous foundations, especially those due to Imperial patronage, were usually decorated in this technique rather than with wall-paintings. As far as iconography, drawing and style are concerned there is little difference between the two arts; it is only the greater rigidity of the colour scheme that was inevitable in mosaics and the nature of the technique itself that distinguished them.

The trends of stylistic influence that we noted in the first chapter, the naturalistic, and the abstract "expressionist," still play an important rôle, but in most monuments of this age it is only by detailed and close analysis that they are to be distinguished, for a fusion of the elements has taken place which gives a new unity to the art, and it is this very fusion that is the hall-mark of the Second Golden Age. True, at times the "expressionism" of Syria is uppermost in a work, and at times classical naturalism is to the fore, but paintings in which these characteristics are obvious are essentially retrospective. In general the outlook of the day was one of deep religious faith, which demanded a blend of abstraction and representation. The ecclesiastical authorities wished to adorn the churches with paintings which would not only tell the story of the Bible, but would also convey something of the more esoteric thought of the speculative theologian, and the artists were in the closest sympathy with the Church, their principal patron. It was said of Constantinople at one time that it was impossible to buy a loaf of bread without getting involved in an abstruse discussion as to the exact nature of the Trinity, and if art was ever a mirror of its age, Byzantine art of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries reflected the spirit of the times with outstanding clarity. Every mosaic, every painting, whether large or small, seems permeated with this deep religious faith.

But in spite of its deeply religious content, the art of this age, and especially the painting, was of very great æsthetic quality, and combined delicacy and elegance with deep significance. At this period, too, painting was universally and unmistakably Byzantine though various subdivisions are to be distinguished by the analytical student. They are groups rather than Schools, for they do not seem to have been associated with any particular locality or workshop, but suggest rather a slight difference of approach by different individuals as well as the use of distinct models. Indeed, the fact that different groups of individuals seem to have shared the same outlook in different places and at different periods was no doubt due to the models that they used. Personal taste was exemplified in the nature of the model selected as well as by stylistic details.

The first of these groups in respect of time may be termed the Monumental; it was the style most in vogue in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Here dignity and grandeur are the ruling factors. Christ, the Virgin, or the Saints concerned are conceived in a rather austere manner, as figures to be admired and emulated, but there is little of human sympathy. In such a scene as the Crucifixion, for example, our Lord stands strong and erect upon the cross; there is no contortion indicative of agony, no movement suggestive of human feeling. The Virgin and St. John indicate Christ with calmness and serenity, and their every gesture denotes a conception of Him as an example, a monument of Faith, not as the beloved son and friend. This strictly restrained approach is apparent on a painting on silk showing *St. Just* † in the Cathedral dedicated to that saint at Trieste. The painting has majesty and grandeur rather than intimacy. It is to be dated to the eleventh or twelfth century. The fact that the name is in Latin characters is in this case fortuitous, for the work is otherwise completely Byzantine.

In opposition to this essentially Monumental manner there arose, so far as we can tell some time in the twelfth century, another and distinct outlook, characterised by a more personal and intimate conception. The earliest surviving works of this type are some wall-paintings at Nerez in Macedonia, dated to 1164, and done in all probability by an artist from Constantinople, so finished and accomplished is the work. They were discovered below layers of later whitewash in 1926. Here human feeling and emotion played an important part in the artist's approach. In the *Deposition*, for example, the Virgin receives the body of our Lord with the most tender compassion, while the other attendant figures are deeply moved with a sadness and pity which is in the greatest contrast to the aloofness of the Trieste *St. Just*. And the portraits of the Saints that occupy the lower registers on the walls are in the same manner. The Saint illustrated on Plate 13, for instance, is redolent of human sympathy and understanding; he is an old man to whom one could tell one's troubles and hope to meet with understanding, rather than an austere figurehead of sainthood, to be admired yet avoided by those seeking consolation.

This same comprehension appears again some thirty years later in the wall-paintings of the Cathedral at Vladimir in Russia, also probably to be attributed to an artist who had studied in Constantinople. They are dated to 1196. The head of St. Paul ‡ in the Last Judgment scene is especially distinguished, for it combines the grandeur of the monumental approach with the deep psychological understanding typical of the new manner. There

† Plate 15 ‡ Plate 14

are other works on Russian soil, some by Greeks from Byzantium, and some by the hands of local painters, many of which show the same intimate feeling.

Though works in the old Monumental manner continued to be produced for two centuries or more, the new outlook gradually superseded the old, and though the Byzantine style never became as free as that of Italy after the time of Giotto, it is nevertheless true that later Byzantine art was now dominated by a humanistic outlook. It is not merely a rigid doctrinal art, as has so often been asserted. It shows a keen understanding of life, balanced, nevertheless, by a deep realisation of all that appertains to the future world; it gives expression to the spirit that is the very essence of Christian thought and faith, and the influence that it exercised on the thirteenth-century painters of Italy was considerable, and had regard to style and spirit as well as iconography.

This new style is usually described as that of the Byzantine Revival or Byzantine Renaissance, but the former is the more apposite description, for there is no conscious looking back to the ancient world as there was in fifteenth-century Italy; we see rather a welling up to the surface of a host of new ideas, a true manifestation of vitality and freshness, combined with a new understanding of the old models that came to Byzantium from the ancient world. The date of the Nerez paintings proves that this was a spontaneous realisation, for they antedate parallel changes in Italy by at least a hundred years. The suggestion at one time put forward, that the Byzantine Revival came about as a result of the Latin Conquest of Constantinople in 1204, need thus no longer be seriously considered. It was to the artistic energy inherent in the Greek race that the new style owed its creation; among peoples with less power of regeneration the great ages of Justinian or the Second Golden Age could hardly have been succeeded by yet another period of outstanding importance.

If the course of historical events were followed exactly by art, it would be appropriate to break off the story of Byzantine painting at the year 1204, when the Fourth Crusade, instead of attacking Moslems in the Holy Land, preferred to sack and loot the Christian city of Constantinople, and to impose Latin rule there for fifty-four years; the story could be resumed when Greek Emperors once more came to rule the Byzantine capital. If we were concerned only with the art of Constantinople, this would indeed be necessary. But in the wider area of the mainland of Greece and parts of the Balkans, development continued uninterrupted, and the break occasioned by the Latin conquest was not universally perceptible, and both the Monumental and the Revival trends continued side by side. It is, indeed, to this age that some of the finest monuments of the latter style belong.

Most important of the Revival monuments are the paintings in the monastery of Sopocani in Serbia. They can be dated to about 1250, and are by the hand of a Greek master: one, perhaps, who studied in Constantinople and fled the capital to escape the Latin domination. The work here is of rare beauty. The composition is balanced and effective, the expressions of the faces full of delicate emotion; a detail of mourners in the scene of *The Death and Assumption of the Virgin* † gives an excellent idea of the high quality of the work. There is clearly something very much more here than competent illustra-

† Plate 18

tion of the Bible story or even than inspired decoration, factors which critics of the past have often conceded as practically the only merits of later Byzantine painting.

Another group of wall-paintings, this time in Bulgaria, are hardly less vital. They are at Boiana, near Sofia, and date from 1259. The figure of *Christ among the Doctors* † may be selected as an example. It is not only deeply spiritual, but also has considerable human feeling, and there is no undue emphasis on unworldly glory. A *Transfiguration* in the same church is in a more ethereal manner; something that is almost religious ecstasy here seems to dominate the artist's outlook.

One day perhaps it may prove possible to add to the list of wall-paintings by examples from Constantinople itself, for there is always the possibility that works may lie hidden below later plaster or whitewash, especially in churches which were taken over as mosques at the time of the Turkish conquest. Till such times, however, we must turn to panels. At this early date they are few and far between, but the few that have been preserved are mostly very fine and serve to attest beyond any possible dispute the high quality of what was being done. Most important of them is the superb panel now preserved in the Tretiakov Gallery at Moscow, known as *Our Lady of Vladimir.* ‡ This lovely painting, thanks to very careful cleaning, can be seen almost in its original state. It is to be attributed in all probability to the twelfth century (it has even been suggested that it is as early as the eleventh) and it was no doubt painted in Constantinople, whence it was transported to Russia soon after. The gentle intimacy of the Virgin, the tenderness with which she presses the Child's cheek to hers, and the beauty of expression on the Child's face are all outstanding, as is the delicate colouring. Seldom has the depth of human sympathy been so effectively combined with truly sincere religious feeling as in this painting, and it is no exaggeration to describe it as one of the greatest Christian paintings in the world. There may be equally great, perhaps even greater, paintings; but never has the very essence of the Christian faith been given such subtle expression in art as here.

A few other extremely fine panels of this age may be mentioned, notably some in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, and others in Russian collections, either from the hands of local painters working under close inspiration from Constantinople, or from those of Greek painters in the homeland, working for Russian patrons. An *Annunciation* § in the Historical Museum at Moscow may be cited, though it is more in the Monumental manner than in that of the Revival, and the artist responsible for it showed little understanding of composition; the individual figures are good, but it falls apart as a picture. It can probably be dated to the twelfth century. Rather finer is a twelfth-century panel in the Tretiakov Gallery at Moscow showing *St. Demetrius of Salonica.*‖ It is dignified and elegant, but here again the intimate psychological understanding of some of the wall-paintings is absent; it may be more decorative, but shows less depth of feeling.

† Plate 16 ‡ Frontispiece § Plate 17 ‖ Plate 25

IV. BYZANTINE *WALL*-PAINTING—THE FOURTEENTH, FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

IN the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the distinction of local Byzantine Schools becomes possible, and as research progresses, the products of different areas (indeed, of the more important towns also) will no doubt come to appear almost as distinct as those of the local Schools in Italy. But in addition to local Schools, three main groups of painting existed, independent of locality, which are of great importance in any attempt to undertake a general survey of the period. Two of these groups we have already discussed; the Monumental and the Revival. The third is a later development, continuing on from the Revival style, but laying in general greater stress on detail; it is characterised by a more meticulous manner better suited to panel than to wall-painting. It will be most satisfactory to call this the Second Revival, and to distinguish the earlier as the First Revival, style.

The wall-paintings that have survived from this age can usually be assigned to one or other of these groups, except perhaps those in out-of-the-way regions, which are more primitive, and have more in common with the old monastic art that we saw in Cappadocia than they have with these more sophisticated developments. Panel paintings and manuscript illuminations also show the same characteristics, and can broadly be considered under one or other of the three headings. Manuscripts, however, now tend in the main to lose something of their old importance, the rich volumes with elaborate decorations giving place in the main to copies of the Gospels in which no more than the portraits of the four Evangelists are present. But here and there more elaborate books do appear, and a *Transfiguration* † from a book executed for the Emperor John Cantacuzenos (1347–1355) may be noted. It has all the qualities of a large painting, and seldom has the Glory of Christ been more effectively conveyed; the painting is a veritable monument of Faith, having all the ethereal quality of the work of a Blake. It shows the intimate feeling of the First Revival style.

Mistra in the Peloponnese is one of the most important centres where Byzantine painting in the Revival style can be studied to-day, for a number of wall-paintings, many of them terribly battered but nearly all of exceptional quality, are preserved there. The colours are bright and contrasting and constitute an essential part of the picture; they were not merely added for decorative purposes. They do not attempt to follow the shades of nature very closely, but seek rather to give relief and life. The modelling is subtle, the understanding of anatomy is considerable. Most striking of all, however, is the ability to render in form the underlying essence of the scene. The lovely composition and the particularly expressive figure of the assistant who removes the gravestone in *The Raising of Lazarus* ‡ in the church of the Pantanassa serve to illustrate this. This man holds his garment to his nose with his left hand, a necessity if the text of the Gospels be called to mind, while his right arm is raised in a gesture which indicates the situation with the same expressive subtlety as, say, the movement of the upraised hand in Hogarth's last episode of *The Rake's Progress*. The only tragedy at Mistra is that the painting has suffered so terribly at the hand of time.

† Plate 22 ‡ Plate 20

Other work in the Pantanassa is of equally high quality, and there are some fragments of good work in the Brontocheion, where vitality is the key-note and where every brush-stroke is alive. Here the colouring adds to the atmosphere, for though there is no attempt to follow nature—an ox in one of the scenes is coloured green—the harmonies are exquisite in themselves, and give the work a brilliance and enchantment which can best be understood by those who have not seen the originals by conjuring up a vision of some exquisite Gothic illumination, such as those that adorn the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Even the portraits of the Prophets and Fathers of the Church, subjects one would imagine of dignity rather than brilliance, show this same enchantment.

Before going on to consider examples elsewhere which belong to this same group, it will be well to examine the paintings of one further church at Mistra, the Peribleptos, which belong to the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Just as the Pantanassa served as the type example of the First Revival style in the first half of the fifteenth century, so the Peribleptos may serve as the type example for the Second Revival style half a century later. In general the figures are rather more elongated than heretofore, the high-lights are more profuse and more precise, and the details of face or costume are depicted with an exactitude better suited to panel or miniature than to wall. The compositions, however, lose nothing by this attention to detail, and many of the scenes are fine pictures, though the individual figures are perhaps more striking.

Outside Mistra, churches in which full schemes of decoration survive are much more numerous in Greece than were examples from earlier centuries, and there are also not a few examples in the rest of the Byzantine world; some paintings, albeit fragments, are even preserved at Constantinople itself. These are in a side-chapel of an exquisite little church usually called by its Turkish name of Kahrieh Djami, better known for its lovely mosaics of 1310–1320. The mosaics, in the First Revival style, are among the most beautiful works produced by Byzantine art; the paintings, which comprise fragmentary scenes and one or two figures of saints, are vigorous, the detail precise, and the work distinguished. It has been suggested that these paintings represent an early work of an artist who later moved to Russia, and whom we know there by the name of Theophanes the Greek.

The Kahrieh paintings now constitute a lone example of the numerous decorations that existed in Constantinople. But on Mount Athos there is a real profusion of decorated churches. True, many of them have been repainted at various periods from the sixteenth century onwards, but these repaintings in many cases follow the original outlines very closely, so that though the colours have been spoiled and the delicacy of detail is lacking, the original composition and design is preserved. They are thus not without interest for the student of artistic style; but to the student of iconography the monuments are all of the first importance, for they are very extensive, the churches being large as well as numerous, so that a very wide selection of scenes could be arranged on their walls.

The iconographical arrangement of these paintings follows a system rigorously laid down in a number of rules, originally handed from master to pupil by word of mouth, but by the time with which we are dealing, collected together into books, the most important of which we know as the *Painter's Guide*. The exact disposition of each figure

was laid down, so that the individual painter was permitted the very smallest latitude in creating his version. This led to a certain sameness and monotony in the paintings of mere craftsmen, but it also led to a high standard, since it was in any case hard for the composition to fail. And the work of the real masters could be just as original within the set bounds as can the playing of a Beethoven sonata on the piano. Just as the sonata itself is set, but the interpretation can vary immeasurably, so in these paintings the man of genius was in no way hampered by the strictness of the rules.

Though quite a number of the painters who worked on Athos are known by name, and though there were local Schools, the same major groups can be distinguished as at Mistra. The wall-paintings of the Protaton at Karyes (fourteenth century, restored in 1540), of the church at Chilandari (*c.* 1302, restored in 1804), of the Chapel of the Baptist at Karyes (fifteenth century) and of the church at Vatopedi (1312, restored 1819) thus belong to the First Revival style. *The Washing of the Feet* † at Vatopedi may serve to illustrate the effective, indeed, beautiful, nature of the composition of a typical scene of this group. And the detail of the work—our Lord, the Apostles, and the curious strapped sandals—is all of high quality. To the Second Revival style belong the church (1535) and the refectory (1512) at the Lavra, the old church at Xenophontos (1544 and 1563), the church and refectory at Dionysiou (1547), and the chapel of St. George in St. Paul's monastery (1555). A detail of Christ from the *Transfiguration* ‡ scene in the last named shows great depth of feeling, and the geometric " glory " behind our Lord is particularly effective in the subtle atmosphere of Faith that it creates. A view of the refectory at the Lavra shows the wealth of material that is available on each wall. §

The two groups on Athos that we have termed here the First and Second Revival styles have usually in the past been designated the Macedonian and the Cretan Schools. But these terms have little to recommend them, for we know few monuments of the former that are actually to be found in Macedonia, and on the island of Crete there are only later works of the second style. Moreover, as we have attempted to show, the First Revival style appeared first in a church decorated by an artist who probably came from Constantinople, while the crystallisation of both groups is most satisfactorily to be studied at Mistra, which is in neither Macedonia nor Crete. The old terms, though hallowed by usage, are thus extremely confusing.

A series of wall-paintings finer than those on Athos is preserved in the churches, most of them monastery churches, of Serbia. Many were the work of Greek masters, as, for instance, those of Nagoricino, done by the Greek painter Eutychios in 1317. His saints are not stereotyped figures, but often show a touch of portraiture rather like that which we see in sculpture in the central tympanum of the great west door of Chartres in the twelfth century. Slav artists soon learnt from the Greeks and as time went on their work came to equal, sometimes even to excel, that of their masters. It is to be distinguished superficially by the presence of Slavonic instead of Greek inscriptions, but, penetrating more deeply below the surface, there are also stylistic differences which make it possible for the expert to tell Slav from Greek work. The differences are subtle and hard to define without the aid of numerous illustrations; they may be compared to those

† Plate 19 ‡ Plate 23 § Plate 24

which distinguished French and English paintings in the early Gothic period. In general, however, the Slav work tends to be more angular and rhythmical, the Greek more flowing and more colouristic.

It is to be regretted that it is not possible to give a fuller account of Serbian wall-painting, for much of it is of extremely high quality; but space is limited and practically no photographs are available in this country. The names of the more important churches may, however, be noted. That of Sopocani we have already mentioned: the work here, dated about 1250, is of the very highest quality. Milesevo (1236) and Moraca (mid-thirteenth century) are nearly as important. To the fourteenth century belong Nagoricino (1317), Gracanica (*c.* 1320) and Decani (*c.* 1330), all in the First Revival style, with little to distinguish them as Slav rather than Greek monuments, though the paintings of the church of Milutin at Studenica (1314), St. Nicholas at Ljuboten (1337), St. Nicetas at Cucer (early fourteenth century) and of that at Pec (*c.* 1310) are more clearly Serb. These again are in the manner of the Revival, though in certain other churches paintings of a more primitive type are to be seen; such are those at Lesnovo (1349), Markov and Matejic (both late fourteenth century).

The Second Revival style, with its love of detail and its bright colouring, penetrated into Serbia only at the end of the fourteenth century. Its most important monuments are at Kalenic (1405–1410), Ljubostinja (1405), Ravanica (1381) and Manasija (1407). In these churches portraiture was especially developed, and there are some very delightful paintings of donors in their rich princely costumes.

Bulgaria also boasts some extremely fine work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, not quite so individual as that of the thirteenth century at Boiana perhaps, but yet outstanding. Churches at Mesembria and Tirnovo in the east contain excellent paintings, and at Sofia itself a frieze of *Prophets* in the church of St. George has a lovely rhythmical swing which has seldom been equalled in Byzantine painting. The church is an early one, and its decoration belongs to several periods, but the Prophets are to be assigned to the latter part of the fourteenth century.

How far the wall-paintings of the fourteenth century in Russia are to be classed as paintings of the Revival style is debatable, for the native idiom in Russia developed more quickly than it did in the Balkans and by 1400 in any case the majority of the work had become essentially Russian. But they have a vigour and liveliness quite distinct from the Monumental manner of earlier centuries. Many of these later wall-paintings in Russia can be attributed to painters whom we know by name and who painted panels as well as walls; they will be discussed in the next chapter.

V. BYZANTINE *PANEL*-PAINTING FROM THE FOURTEENTH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

THE same groups that we have distinguished with regard to wall-paintings in Greece are also to be distinguished in panels, but the two styles of the Revival are the most important. Before we discuss them, however, one panel in the Monumental manner must be mentioned, partly because it happens to be preserved in the British Museum in London, so that it is easily accessible, unlike the majority of the works mentioned, which for most of us are available only in reproductions. The icon is in four sections, showing the *Annunciation*, the *Nativity*, the *Baptism* and the *Transfiguration*. It came from Egypt, but the style is essentially that of the central part of the Byzantine world; it might well have been painted in Constantinople. It can be dated to the thirteenth century, and the whole rendering is conservative, for it has dignity and grandeur, but little intimacy.

It is interesting to compare this panel with one in the Museum of Fine Art at Moscow of the fourteenth century, showing *St. George*.† This still has much of the dignity of the Monumental style, but the treatment is lighter and the rendering more delicate. The subject is not one which permits of great emotion or of the vivid details which are often present in work of the Revival style, but one feels that the artist, had he been painting a scene, would have allowed both these factors to influence his work, according to the nature of the subject. It is probable that painters working both in the Revival and in the Monumental manners worked at Constantinople simultaneously, and this panel again might well be attributed to the capital. If it was painted in Russia, which is unlikely, it must have been the work of a Greek, not of a Russian master.

The complete change to the spirit of the Revival is apparent in a panel of *The Crucifixion* ‡ in the Byzantine Museum at Athens of the early fourteenth century, probably painted at Salonica, though the style of this city, the second in the Empire at this time, was very close to that of the capital. Our Lord's face has been very severely damaged, but the body survives. It is of great loveliness, and the distortions of the figure of our Lord, the thin arms and the long torso, must have been definitely intentional, in order to enhance the tragedy of the scene. The St. John again is a figure of great beauty and pathos. But it is above all the tall, elongated figure of the Virgin that attracts the attention, for it is possessed of a rare beauty as well as a very great depth of understanding.

Another extremely fine panel of the fourteenth century, also preserved in Athens, but this time at the Benaki Museum, shows *The Transfiguration*.§ It is in the first place significant on account of its unusual size, being nearly five feet high; but the work is also of high quality. It is in a much severer vein than *The Crucifixion*, but must nevertheless be regarded as in the First Revival style, though the change has gone less far than in much fourteenth-century work: compare, for example, the peculiarly lovely rendering of the same subject in the manuscript of John Cantacuzenos. Fine or grand is the apposite description one would give to the icon; beautiful or moving are the terms one would choose for the miniature. But the icon is rather more complex, for whereas only the manifestation of our Lord and the awe of the three Apostles who accompanied Him is

† Plate 26 ‡ Plate 28 § Plate 21

shown in the illumination, on the icon we also see to the left the approach of our Lord and His companions, and on the right we see them descending from the mountain. Three distinct scenes are thus shown in the same picture, a practice which was normal in Byzantine art. It is usually referred to as the complementary system of iconography.

Unlike Western works, the majority of these panels depict saints or religious scenes; they are thus concerned with giving expression to an idea, rather than reproducing any actual or living form. At this period, however, portraits do occasionally appear, and a particularly delightful one, dated to 1356 and preserved in the church of the Chrysaliniotissa at Nicosia in Cyprus, may be noted. It depicts a youthful princess, clothed in a rich silken garment. Above her are her parents, their hands raised over her head to bless her. Above again are angels, and at the top of the panel, which is unusually tall and narrow, is the figure of Christ. Apart from the charm of the princess, the panel is important in that it is one of the few definitely dated pieces that have come down to us, for the inscription below the parents' arms records that the girl died on the first of August 1356. Her name was Maria, and her father is called the Lord Manuel, the lay-reader. The icon was no doubt presented to the church by her parents as a memorial.

It is to the Second Revival style that most of the icons of Greece are to be assigned. The bright colours and detailed manner, which we noted as being hardly ideal for wall-paintings on a large scale, are, on the other hand, particularly well suited to panel-paintings in a medium which, if not identical with, is at least closely akin to the tempera of the West. Especially characteristic of this style are the high-lights, which are indicated as a series of parallel streaks upon the faces as well as on the costumes. They are usually white on the former and coloured in pale shades of green, blue or purple on the latter, according to the colour of the stuff on which they are placed. These high-lights are the direct opposite of Western shading, and their effect is not to produce a naturalistic resemblance by stressing plasticity and relief, but to stress the ethereal, unworldly character of the figures. They are present in nearly all the paintings of this age, but the manner of execution varies with the School or artist, some painters treating them with great delicacy, others laying them on with wide, sweeping brush strokes, suggestive of the manner adopted by some of the most advanced painters of the twentieth century.

These high-lights are probably equally important in Greek, Balkan and Russian work alike. It is the colouring, the nature of the drawing, and, most of all, the style that distinguish the products of the various areas. Icons of the Balkans are, in general, less important than those of Greece or Russia, and though a good deal of very beautiful work was done in Greece in the fifteenth and even in the sixteenth centuries, much of the later work there tended to monotony and sterility. Because of this monotony, problems of dating are considerable; nothing like the precision that is obtainable with regard to Western works of this date is possible. But certain extraneous factors are helpful, especially inscriptions which now quite often contain the name of the painter. Quite a number of these painters in Greece are known by name, even if we know little of their lives; personality still counts for little in the Orthodox world, where work was done to the greater glory of God, rather than to express the feelings and ideas of a particular

individual. Even so, works which are not signed can sometimes be attributed to artists on stylistic grounds. Thus a very fine panel showing the death and scenes from the life of St. Ephraim the Syrian (in Captain Spencer Churchill's collection at Northwick Park in Gloucestershire) is almost certainly by a painter named Zanfurnari, who worked between 1595 and 1626. A very similar panel, bearing the artist's signature, is preserved in the Vatican Gallery.† It is essentially a story-telling picture, and has not the great spiritual quality of some of the earlier works, but it is none the less a very delightful painting, full of fun and vivid interest.

Later panel-painting in Russia showed rather greater vitality and originality than that of Greece. But before speaking of these later centuries we must return to the point where we left the story in the twelfth century, with a discussion of paintings in the Byzantine manner which had either been exported to Russia from Constantinople or painted in Russia by Greek craftsmen. Alongside these works in the Byzantine style, using the word in its narrower sense, as applying to Constantinople, others existed, some of which have survived to this day, which are clearly to be assigned to Russian artists. Two such may be noted. First is a small panel in the Historical Museum at Moscow, dated to the twelfth or early thirteenth century, showing an angel, usually termed *The Golden-haired Angel*. It is hard to define in concrete terms what it is that distinguishes this work as Russian; most important, perhaps, is a greater suavity of line and a more marked stress on rhythmical factors. The suavity of line is apparent in the lovely, gentle curves of the neck and eyebrows; the rhythmical treatment is apparent in the pattern of the hair plaits.

Rather more Monumental, but of much the same date, is a fine icon in the Yaroslavl Museum showing the Virgin and Child—she bears the special designation, *Our Lady of Tolga*.‡ The Virgin is seated on an elaborate jewelled throne, the Child on her knee, His face pressed against hers. The eyes are closely similar to those of *The Golden-haired Angel* in shape, and there is something essentially Russian about them. Russian again are the minute, thin hands, a feature rarely seen in Greek work, and the rhythmical movements of the two angels at the top of the icon are also much more Russian than Greek. The colouring too is of a type unusual in Greek work; most distinctive is the silver background, something practically unknown in Greece, but in Russia especially usual in work of the Suzdal School.

It is in such examples as these, and in their successors of the next two centuries, that we see the characteristics of Russian painting being developed; but though progress was rapid, and by the fourteenth century quite a number of independent Schools had grown up, Greek painters still continued to go to Russia from Constantinople. We have already called attention to one of them, who probably did some of the wall-paintings in Kahrieh Djami at Constantinople before he left the capital, namely, Theophanes the Greek (see p. 16). By 1378 Theophanes was in Russia, for he did wall-paintings in the Cathedral of the Transfiguration at Novgorod in that year. Though he was a Greek by birth and training, he was soon so overwhelmed by the spirit of Russia that his panels, if not his wall-paintings, are much more Russian than they are Greek in character. So El Greco, at a later date, was overwhelmed by the spirit of Spain, though his earliest works were, we

† Plate 29 ‡ Plate 27

believe, in the Byzantine manner (see p. 23). A lovely *Assumption of the Virgin* from the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow which is by Theophanes is thus essentially Russian; the rhythmical treatment and suave rendering distinguish it from Greek work, and another feature which has become typical of Russia by the later fourteenth century is also apparent—namely, the low, sloping shoulders that give the figures a curious, bottle-like shape.

By 1405 Theophanes was working on wall-paintings in the Cathedral of the Annunciation at Moscow, in company with a painter of Russian blood, Andrew Rublev. Rublev's work is probably better known in the West than that of any other individual painter of the Byzantine world, for, even if his name is unfamiliar, one of his works has been quite frequently reproduced, namely an icon known as *The Old Testament Trinity*,† formerly in the monastery of the Trinity at Moscow, and now in the Tretiakov Gallery in the same town. The icon is obviously of rare beauty; it is also a very important piece of religious imagery, and serves admirably to illustrate the esoteric outlook of the Russian, indeed of the Byzantine, mind. The outward theme is that of three angels entertained by the hospitable Abraham as recorded in Genesis xviii, verse 2. But the inner significance is far greater; it is that of the Trinity itself, the basic conception of Christian theology. No artist, it was thought, could attempt to portray so intensely significant a subject by direct representation; some sort of symbol was essential. The nature of the symbol varied at different times; that of the Old Testament Trinity was common, and the good Christian, when he saw an icon of this subject, realised at once its inner meaning. And in the case of Rublev's rendering, something of the very essence of the Faith seems to have entered into the painting. As sincere as any work of Fra Angelico, its very reticence in avoiding the figure of Christ or the Almighty lends it an added force and significance.

A few more works of Rublev are known to us. One, a copy of *Our Lady of Vladimir*, is a very delicate and lovely painting, but it is perhaps most important as an illustration of the progress of Russian art. It is thus a very free copy and is in style essentially of the early fifteenth century. In a more static age it might easily have been no more than a stereotyped reproduction, following the original line for line and detail for detail. Nearly all the world's great painters have at one time or another made copies of the works of the masters who preceded them, usually with the same freedom that we see here. Many minor painters, too, have reproduced earlier works with greater exactitude. But nowhere in the history of Western art is there an earlier instance of a great work serving to inspire a genius to a new creation, as the Vladimir panel inspired Rublev.

Space does not permit any detailed examination of later painting in Russia, which continued to develop until the seventeenth century, when a new manner, introduced from the West, superseded the old. Suffice it to say that most of the more important centres of culture had Schools of their own. The earliest, Kiev, was essentially Byzantine, but those that followed it, Novgorod, Vladimir, Pskov, Suzdal and finally Moscow, are essentially Russian. As in Greece, names of painters begin to be recorded from the time of Rublev onwards. Of the later ones Master Denys, who worked on wall and panel alike, was the most important. If his work lacks something of the majesty

† Colour Plate 2

Plate 2

Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow

THE OLD TESTAMENT TRINITY *By Rublev* (*c.*1370-1430)

Panel

Russian

of the earlier periods, it has great elegance and delicacy, and a more individual manner, combined with a more developed sense of beauty, than that of any contemporary in Greece.

One further painter of genius must be noted before we leave the Byzantine world; the Cretan Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco. He was born, so far as we know, at a little village called Fodele, near Candia in Crete, in the year 1541. It was presumably there that he made his first essays in painting. Before 1570 he was in Italy, where he assimilated the manner of the Renaissance, which dominated his work for the rest of his life. But now and again in his later work he reverted to Byzantine iconographical systems, as, for example, in *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, which may be compared with the central portion of the panel by Zanfurnari, or to Byzantine mannerisms, as, for example, in his painting of *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (in the National Gallery, Dublin), where the dark background against which the Saint is silhouetted reproduces an ancient Byzantine system whereby a figure is set before what is virtually a reflex of form, though it began its history as the representation of some actual object such as a bed or the mouth of a cave. Apart from this retrospection, a few early works show even clearer Byzantine affinities. Most important of these are two *Views of Mount Sinai*,† one at Modena, and the other in the Hatvany Collection at Budapest. A comparison of these with *The Transfigurations* shown on Plates 21 and 22 at once indicates the origin of the three formal mountains which constitute the main theme of El Greco's pictures. Byzantine icons exist which show the same theme, and which in the details, notably the monastery and the travellers arriving on camels, are identical with those in El Greco's rendering. Or rather, his picture is identical with them, for they or their direct ancestors were the earlier, and it was from them that El Greco first learnt.

VI. PAINTING IN THE WEST

WHILE these developments were taking place in the Byzantine world, art had continued to develop in the West, and though on the whole a good deal less was produced there than in the East, paintings of high quality were nevertheless executed in Germany, France and England. Unfortunately, wall-paintings, which were no doubt important, have seldom been preserved, in any case from early times, and panels are totally lacking. The lacuna is, however, once more made up by manuscript illustrations.

Perhaps the most distinctive, essentially Western School was that which flourished in Northern Britain and Ireland from about 650 onwards. We know from records that work was to some extent inspired by models brought from Italy, for Benedict Biscop, who founded the monastery of Monkswearmouth about 678, is known to have brought home paintings from Rome, and these cultural links were cemented by Wilfrid, Archbishop of York, who was a keen patron of the arts. Here and there, Byzantine influence is clearly to be traced in surviving works. Four pages of the *Book of Lindisfarne*, for example, bear

† Plate 30

portraits of the Evangelists,† clearly copied from Byzantine models, even to the extent of using the Greek word *hagios* instead of the Latin *sanctus*. It is probable that such wall-paintings and panels as were produced in Britain at this time were of similar character.

But the rest of the *Book of Lindisfarne*, which was probably done in the monastery on the island of that name about 670, is in a very different style. Here formal patterns, interlacing bands, spirals, and stylised animal forms run in enchanting exuberance over the whole page, and it is obvious that it was in work of this style that the native artists were most completely at home. The portraits of the Evangelists show a somewhat strained effort at copying an unfamiliar model; here everything is a free, unfettered creation. This glorious spontaneous art, which has no desire to represent but seeks rather to create something entirely new, conceived in the mind, is the descendant of a very distinct stem. Its links are with the pre-Christian arts of Northern Europe, where stylisation of one sort or another was the ruling factor. The line of descent can be traced through a long series of links in time and space to Western Asia and to the middle of the first millennium before Christ or even earlier. It was the art stream of the Northern nomads, which we know at various other stages of its development under such names as Scythian, Sarmatian, Frankish or Visigothic.

The greatest glories of the style as manifested in the Christian manuscripts of the British Isles must be assigned to Ireland, for it was probably there that the greatest developments were made; and the Lindisfarne Book, though no doubt done in the island of that name, is closely akin to the Irish work. Other books of the same type, similarly inspired by the agency of wandering monks, were also executed on the Continent, in Germany, Spain and Italy. Of the Irish examples, the earliest that survives is the *Book of Durrow*, now preserved at Trinity College, Dublin. Its pages have a heavier, more monumental manner than those of the Lindisfarne Gospels, but it is to be questioned if they are quite as beautiful. A completely linear manner is obviously better suited to this art than the heavier, more modelled conception of Durrow. The book was probably done at Durrow at the very end of the seventh century, and it was followed by a number of others, the best known of which is the *Book of Kells*, to be dated a hundred years or so later. This is again rather less linear than Lindisfarne, but the slightly lumpy manner of Durrow is absent, and the animal work is especially vigorous. Each animal form, in spite of the stylisation, remains astonishingly vital, and however much the body curls and twists one still feels that the creature could move and walk were it minded to do so. It is no mere art of stylisation and pattern, but rather one of intensely alive creation.

The human figures in the *Book of Kells* ‡ are less satisfactory, despite the lovely colours and high decorative quality of the work. They do not follow East Christian models with the same fidelity as do the Evangelists in the *Book of Lindisfarne*, being overcharged with ornament quite foreign to any style that was basically representational. But they do follow, though with little understanding, and probably at several removes, some extraneous model, which was in all probability Byzantine. A curious instance of such copying, which also illustrates the artist's lack of understanding in representational art,

† Plate 31 ‡ Plate 32

is to be seen in the mouths of some of the figures, such as the Christ in the *Book of Kells*. Here the outline is twice repeated, and a gold lip and a red mouth form completely separate entities. It is possible that in this case the model was a Byzantine *cloisonnée* enamel, where the gold band bordering the enamel and the red paste itself were both reproduced by a copyist who had no understanding of what they were meant to represent.

But in spite of this, the *Book of Kells* represents the peak of this Hibernian School of illumination, though quite a considerable number of other books, preserved in libraries in this country and on the Continent, are little less superb. Good work was indeed done for another century or more, and even in later times, when a new wave of figural art had come to Britain, and when representation and narrative were the principal objectives, the old decorative interlacings and spirals crop up from time to time.

With the devastations wrought by the Danish invasions of the ninth century this Hiberno-Anglian School came to an end. But on the Continent the Carolingian School flourished (see p. 10), and was succeeded directly in the tenth century by that which we know as the Ottonian. This was an age of crystallisation, in art as in politics, and Ottonian manuscripts, though obviously of the same family as the Carolingian, are nevertheless to be distinguished by a manner of their own.

The Ottonian style came about to some extent as the result of an upwelling of old Northern ideas, and a love of stylisation and rhythmical movement exercised a greater influence than it had done in Carolingian times. Ottonian work is thus in the main linear rather than modelled; the human figures tend to be angular and ill proportioned; the folds of the draperies often bear more resemblance to spiral patterns than they do to the undulations of a textile. Such elements are, it is true, not always present in Ottonian products, but as far as manuscript illustrations are concerned, their presence serves as a useful guide, for the rhythmical treatment is quite foreign to Carolingian work. In addition to this influence, which is basically indigenous, extraneous elements from the Byzantine world are also often very prominent. They were introduced as a result of direct contacts between the Ottonian Emperors and the Byzantine capital; a number of embassies were exchanged, trade was quite extensive, and one of the Ottos even married a Byzantine princess, Theophano, who, it is believed, brought with her to the West not only objects which served as models for Western craftsmen, but also Byzantine workmen, who may well have set up Schools in their new home. This Byzantine influence is more clearly apparent in ivories than in the other arts, but it was exercised in every sphere, including painting.

Finer in quality than any of the Continental book-illustrations of this period were those produced in England in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The period covered by the Danish invasions had laid waste centres of culture and put a stop to such activities as painting, so that the Northumbrian style had been forgotten. Indeed, the work of the age we are considering is in a completely different vein, influenced rather from the Continent. Figures form the essential part of each picture, and though the surrounding borders play a more important part than is usual in the classical or the Byzantine worlds, their component parts are treated to a great extent naturalistically, though there are hints of the old Celtic

love of pattern. This new style bursts forth suddenly into full flower, some of the earliest works that we know being among the finest. The main centre was at Winchester, at the New Minster, founded by St. Aethelwold in 966, and the finest work is to be assigned to the tenth century. But within a generation a number of other Schools of painting had been established at other monastic centres, the most important of which were probably Canterbury, St. Albans and Bury St. Edmunds. There is little, however, that can be definitely associated with these places, whereas by a lucky chance quite a large number of manuscripts produced at Winchester have been preserved.

Of these the earliest in date is *King Edgar's Charter*, done at the New Minster in 966. The work shows the influence of the Continent, both Carolingian and Byzantine elements being present, but it is also distinctively English, and, when once familiarity with the Winchester style has been acquired, it could not be mistaken for anything else. The grandeur of the rendering and the rather heavy colouring that are apparent here would have been admirably suited to wall-paintings ; and as the Saxon churches of the period, with their small doors and narrow windows, provided ample space for such work, there is every reason to suppose that wall-paintings existed, though none have survived. Finer, in any case, as regards detail, is the lovely Benedictional of St. Aethelwold, with thirty full-page miniatures. That showing *The Three Marys at the Sepulchre* is reproduced on Plate 37. The manuscript was done at New Minster between 976 and 980, and in its work the true genius of the English painter is at its height. Especially distinctive, and of great loveliness, are the fluttering draperies and, perhaps even more, the beautifully balanced ornamental borders, which are present in practically all the work of this School. The treatment is linear rather than plastic, but the colour harmonies are enchanting, except for the rather heavy whitish-pink faces, which are less effective than the costumes.

The feeling for line which is apparent here is given even freer play in another group of manuscripts, in which there are no large illuminations, but where vivid line-drawings in black are inserted in the text. These show a great love of life, and the artists responsible obviously took intense delight in the depiction of busy little figures and lively scenes. They herald those enchanting details of everyday life and activity—the carpenter at his bench, the labourer in the field, the cook in his kitchen—which are so popular in the Gothic period in sculpture, illumination and glass-painting alike. There are also some spirited drawings of animals, which again attest the artists' keen powers of observation.

Though there are no wall-paintings in Great Britain that can be assigned to the years before the Conquest, there are quite a number of twelfth-century examples. One of these, in St. Anselm's Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, though usually dated about 1130, might well, on the analogy of sculpture, be a hundred years earlier so far as the style is concerned. It shows *St. Paul at Malta*,† when he collected sticks for the fire and was stung by a viper. The whole manner of the work, drawing, iconography, colouring and style, is closely related to the Byzantine, and there is every reason to suppose that a model from Constantinople was followed fairly closely; the painter might even have learnt from a

† Colour Plate 3

Plate 3 *St. Anselm's Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral*

ST. PAUL AT MALTA (*c.*1130)

Wall-painting

Canterbury School

Byzantine master, though he was certainly an Englishman, and a painter of very great genius. A similarly close Byzantine influence is to be seen in Saxon sculpture, but it disappears with the Norman Conquest, or rather, when the new style introduced by the Normans begins to make itself felt, for in out-of-the-way places this was often nearly a century later than the year 1066.

Some other paintings at Canterbury, in St. Gabriel's Chapel in the crypt, are in a distinct style, and Byzantine influence is rather less to the fore; they are clearly Western, whereas the *St. Paul* is much closer to a Byzantine work; they are probably to be dated about 1140. The work shows considerable maturity and sureness of touch: the colours are bright and attractive and the drawing vigorous, but the dignity and sense of essentials which characterise the *St. Paul* are absent and the style is on the whole more naïve. It is the work of a new budding art, not yet quite sure of itself. The *St. Paul* is redolent of the accumulated wisdom of an age-old though by no means sterile culture.

A School which was quite distinct from Canterbury was working at Lewes Priory from soon after the Conquest, and a number of fragmentary decorations in small churches in Sussex and Surrey can in all probability be assigned to it, though there are very considerable local variations. Most complete of the works of this group are the wall-paintings at Hardham, done about 1125, in a rather heavy, sombre manner, though this effect is relieved to some extent by the elongated figures and the strange angular attitudes. A rendering of the *Three Magi* † is especially interesting, for it shows how far the painter has ventured from the old traditional iconography of the Byzantine world or the areas which depended for inspiration on Byzantine or Classical art. At Hardham, the Magi are in contemporary Western costume, and their appearance is suggestive of three palmers from some romantic legend rather than of the three Kings of the East who paid homage to our Lord. An actual painting of a *Palmer*,‡ at Kempley in Gloucestershire, may be compared. It was done about 1150, and is to be regarded as a work of the Winchester School, showing all the delicacy and finish which was associated with that School in manuscript illumination in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Although illuminations that could definitely be attributed to East Anglia were lacking in the tenth and eleventh centuries, quite a number that can be associated with Bury St. Edmunds or other places in that region exist from the twelfth century, and there are as well one or two surviving wall-paintings. Most important perhaps are those at Copford in Essex. We illustrate the scene of the *Healing of Jairus's Daughter*. § The work is highly accomplished, the drawing good, and the colouring effective. A full cycle of New Testament scenes was originally included.

The marked differences that are to be seen between these works, and indeed many others which it has not been possible to mention here, all belonging to the twelfth century, serve to give an idea of the flourishing state of art in England at this time.

English twelfth-century painting is quite distinct from contemporary Continental work, but Fate has decreed that practically no examples of painting have come down to us from Normandy itself. It is rather to Central France that we must turn to find the finest examples of Continental wall-painting between the late tenth and early twelfth centuries,

† Plate 34 ‡ Plate 33 § Plate 35

the age in which that great style in architecture and sculpture that we know as Romanesque flourished. There, in Burgundy and in the region of Poitiers, a number of wall-paintings have been preserved, some of them in very good condition. The problems of dating them exactly are considerable, for they were seldom contemporary with the buildings to which they belong, and style varies a great deal from region to region. They can at best be dated within a period of some fifty years or so in the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

The main stylistic groups are distinguished according to the predominance of external influence to be observed. Some are thus conservative, looking back to Carolingian prototypes; some show links with Italy or, in the south, with Spain; others are clearly inspired by Byzantine models, though curiously enough the influence in this case is more that of the Eastern monastic art of Cappadocia than that of the accomplished art of Constantinople; others again, like those of Tavant, owe their principal fame to the originality of the artist. The Eastern influence is clearly shown by a painting of the *Archangel Michael* at Le Puy. The deep colouring, the severe, frontal attitude, the heavy manner, and the interest shown in the jewels that decorate the costume are all features that we see in Cappadocia, but which are absent in the central region. A similar East Christian influence is to be seen in the fine paintings that decorate the apse of Berzé-la-Ville, near Cluny, where saints occupy the walls below, and a large figure of Christ the conch above.† This work may be regarded as typical of what the Cluniac School of painting stood for. In architecture and sculpture this name implies a distinctive style, the influence of which was very considerably extended, for it reaches right into Spain in one direction and into Italy in the other, not to mention the large area of Southern France in which it dominated. But too few examples of painting survive to permit us to form any exact idea of the extent of the Cluniac School in this art. We can say, however, that the paintings of Berzé-la-Ville and Le Puy are quite distinct in style from those of the Poitiers regions, as for example the lovely scenes that decorate the roof of the great barrel-vaulted church of St. Savin, some forty miles from Poitiers. These date from the latter half of the twelfth century. Here the colouring is light and delicate, the style lively, the details vivacious, and there is little suggestive of the more sombre style of Berzé-la-Ville. Several hands can be distinguished at St. Savin, but all were working in the same manner. The scenes depicted are all from the Old Testament: that of *The Offerings of Cain and Abel* ‡ may serve as an example.

These paintings, like those of Hardham in England, mark a turning-point, for there are already hints of a new interest in man and his deeds, as opposed to man and his faith. We seem almost to be on the verge of Gothic art; and the old manner, which had reigned supreme for so many centuries in East and West alike, was beginning to become outmoded. The Byzantine Revival, on the one hand, the similar work in the West on the other, marked the last great flowering of this old art. Its long history belonged to the age of Christian ascendancy, when the power of the Church was unassailed and when Faith was the governing factor of life. The new art reflects rather the spirit of the Romance age—we see a hint of it in *The Magi* at Hardham or *The Palmer* at Kempley—when the ideals

† Colour Plate 4 ‡ Plate 36

Plate 4 *Berzé-la-Ville, near Cluny*

CHRIST IN GLORY *Twelfth century*

Wall-painting (*from facsimile in Musée de la Fresque, Paris*) Cluniac School

of chivalry to a great extent replaced those of dogmatic Christianity, when the monasteries had become the centres of temporal power rather than the resort of the holy man or the ascetic; when the demand set on the artist was no longer to illustrate the Christian story, but rather to create vivid scenes in which details of the life of this world take the primary place. The spirit of abstraction which ruled in the Byzantine period and in contemporary work in the West was dead. In the next age the artist was more concerned with visual representation than with the creation of a visionary world conceived in the mind rather than seen with the eye.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

A.D.	BYZANTINE AREA	ITALY	WESTERN EUROPE
200–300		Catacomb Paintings	
300–400 400–500	Age of formation of Byzantine Art	Early Mosaics of Rome and Ravenna	
500–600 600–700	FIRST GOLDEN AGE Justinian 527–565	Later Mosaics—Ravenna	Northumbrian School
700–800 800–900	ICONOCLASM 726–843	Charlemagne crowned at Rome, 800	Carolingian School
900–1000 1000–1100 1100–1200	THE SECOND GOLDEN AGE Monumental style		Ottonian School Winchester School Romanesque art in France and England
1200–1300	BYZANTINE REVIVAL BEGINS First Revival style (sometimes called Macedonian School)	Cimabue, Giotto, Duccio. *Birth of the Renaissance*	
1300–1400	Second Revival style (sometimes called Cretan School)		

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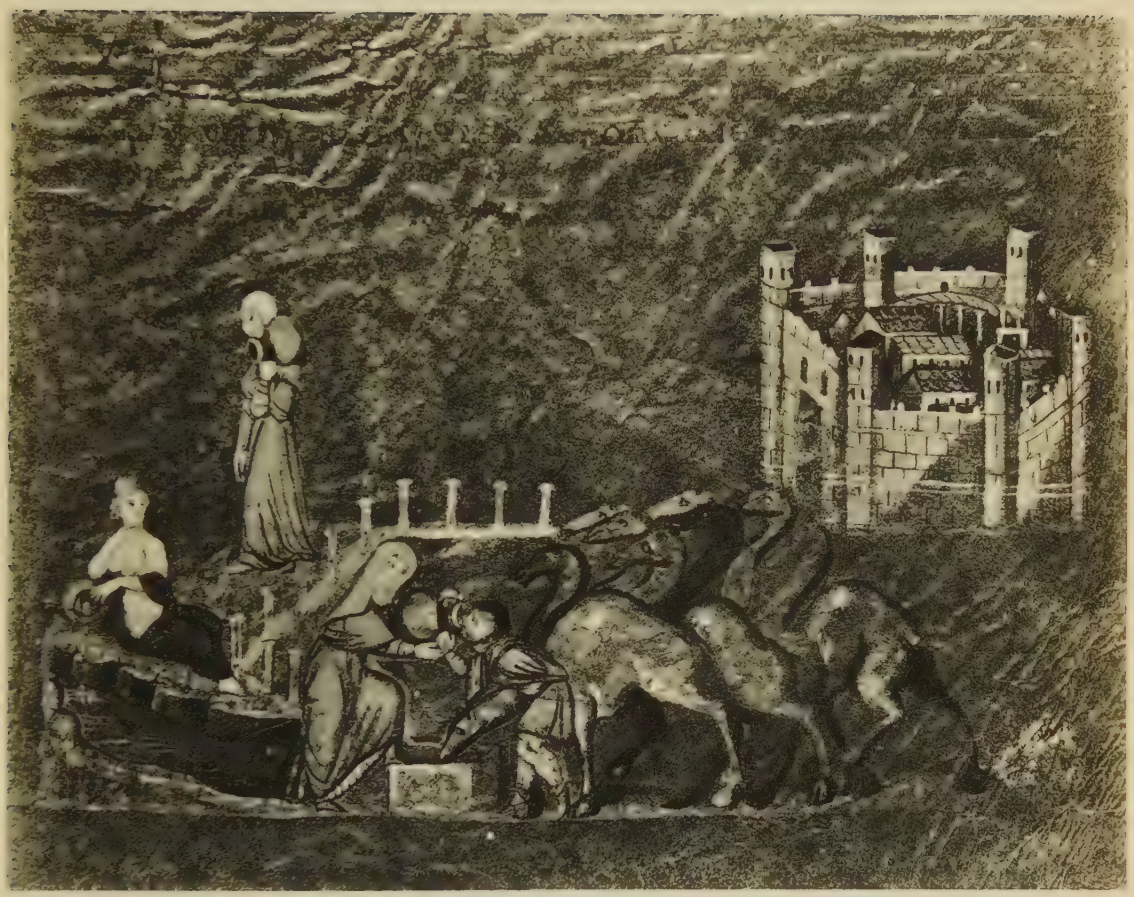

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Winchester School

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